

# S.E.C. NEWS

## Are you in or out?

Members are reminded that to remain a member it is necessary to pay an annual subscription of \$6.50

At present, payment of the annual subscription is the test of active membership.

This activity test was introduced in 1998.

Members who have not paid the annual subscription and owe subscription payment in 2001 for 1998, 1999 and 2000, will be given notification of their removal from membership - with the option of addressing a general meeting of the co-operative.

## Taking the Pulse

United Energy has taken to the Pulse! Captive consumers of United Energy have been transferred to Pulse!

Pulse is our new energy provider - jointly owned by United Energy, Energy Partnership (Ikon), Shell and Woodside Energy.

Much has been written about consumer choice in the deregulated market - that some time after 1 January 2001 we will have a choice of provider. The theory of choice is that we can shop around and switch suppliers.

Nobody chose to switch from United Energy to Pulse. I guess that is a different kind of choice - dictated by suppliers.

The point about consumer empowerment is that consumers start making choices - based on our joint purchasing power. That is real choice.

## US Experience

For those who doubt the reality of consumer empowerment through co-operation, there is an opportunity to attend a

seminar and hear about the USA experience.

Energy consultant Robert L. Church will be in Victoria between 31 July and the 3 August 2000.

Church has done work with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and has been involved in the development of new energy co-operatives.

He will be speaking at a workshop on the 1 August 2000. The workshop is sponsored by the Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd, Co-operative Energy Ltd and the Victorian Local Governance Association.

Participants at the workshop are provided with morning and afternoon tea and lunch and an information kit - including two new booklets published by Co-operative Energy Ltd.

The cost of the workshop is \$100 but for members of Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd it is only \$50. Unemployed and pensioners are free.

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# The Co-operative Situation: It is Not Over Yet

A.R.Gourley

We began our co-operative at a time when the restructured State Electricity Commission was about to be sold off,

That happened, and nobody could stop the change from fully state to fully private control, like it or not.

The Regulator-General, so threateningly named, is the only vestige of community influence left.

The idealistic middle way of providing a service would have been co-operatives. This did not take place, but at least we started out - and still exist. And it is not over yet.

## Idealistic Advantage

We know that even in the USA, all forms of businesses are operating; State, private and co-operative businesses and all provide electricity. The co-operative method has the idealistic advantage of rugged individualism (consumer run) and democratic ownership (one member one vote).

We have learnt that a co-operative is simply another form of business operation. This should have been obvious, but has taken a while to realize, especially in the changing times and when our hopes for a more ideal system were being stimulated by these changes.

However, there is a Co-operatives Act 1996, and there is tight control, very much like that applying to private and public companies. For example, co-operatives must have an annual external audit of their finances.

Like any business, co-operatives have to have a practical purpose. Each needs to set out to provide at least one particular service to its members.

The service is likely to be one that only the co-operative will provide (like electricity for rural Americans) or which the co-operative can provide better (like farm supplies to Victorians or banking to UK residents). The service or services can change as the need arises or departs or is satisfied.

## A Good Deal

Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd is concentrating on finding a good deal for members when domestic customers can choose their electricity retailer starting from 1 January 2001. There are other possibilities; please let us know if there is anything you want us to do.

We need our members to tell us how to achieve our purpose. You could tell us your thoughts and wishes; you could join the board; you could send an annual contribution (in addition to the \$6.50 subscription and preferably \$10 in total) to cover all our mailing and help with the auditing.

## See & Hear

We would like to see you at any meeting, and particularly like to hear about your ideas for adding to our income.